

# ARTFORUM

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Richard Serra, *Sawing*, wood, lead, marble, antimony, steel, 1969. Castelli Warehouse.



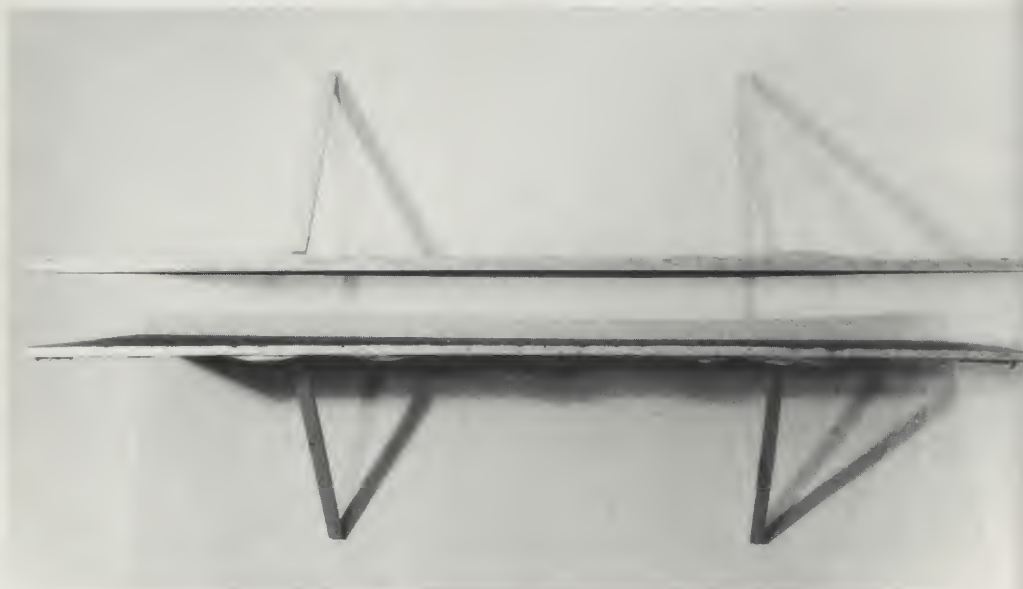
Richard Serra, *Casting with Four Molds* (to Eva Hesse), lead, ca. 22 x 32'', 1969. Castelli Warehouse.



Richard Serra, *Two, Two, One*, (to Tina and Dicky), lead, 1969. Castelli Warehouse.



Richard Serra, *5:30*, lead, 1969.



James Rosenquist, *Five Ups*, o/c 66 x 96'', 1969.



**RICHARD SERRA, Castelli Warehouse; PAINTING ANNUAL, Whitney Museum; SPACES, Museum of Modern Art; ART IN PROCESS IV, Finch College:**

Stepping into sculpture as if no one were home, Richard Serra continues to systematically lay claim to the entire estate. *Sawing*, the first piece one sees upon entering the exhibition, comes off as a bulky scatter piece, vaguely indebted to the de-differentiation pieces of Barry Le Va and Robert Morris. A few minutes of looking reveal the work to be in no sense a scatter piece and in no way concerned with the esthetics of the de-differentiated field. Instead, the piece reveals itself to be concerned with the problem of combining different materials in the same work in some sort of convincing manner (i.e., not a fur-lined teacup or any of its variations). The solution was to unify the various materials by subjecting them to the same process, in this case sawing. As becomes increasingly plain from simply looking at the piece, lengths of wooden beam, marble slab, steel plate and lead pole were laid crosswise across a steel template as one might lay a log across a railroad track. The parts that hung over were sawed off and allowed to remain roughly where they fell. The work is thus a process piece in a very elegant sense, for it delivers to us in an admirably straightforward way not only the process of its making, but also the information that the same process is also the solution to the problem dealt with in the work, i.e., the sawing plainly both makes the piece and is also that which unifies the various materials in the work. To my mind it's Serra's most beautiful, completely realized work to date.

With the exception of a large splashed-lead piece, the rest of the works in the exhibition are made of 4-foot square sheets of lead and rolls of lead pipe about eight feet long. They deal with the issues forced into sculpture mainly by the work of Carl Andre: the limitations of materials, structural consistency, the explicit acknowledgement of gravity, clarity of the interrelations between artist and material. Within the limits of this kind of literalism, the elements of a sculpture cannot simply renounce their floor-bound nature and commence piling, tacking or welding

themselves up into a gravity-defying abstraction. When the elements of a sculpture come off the floor they must do so in a structurally convincing manner, and each element earns its place in the work by serving an indispensable structural function. And even though the structural logic of each piece is as plain and as satisfying as can be, there is no point in the exhibition at which we are allowed to forget that the issue is *still* one of coming off the floor, a hazardous, unnatural and perhaps even unnecessary business. (Best made clear by the heaviness of lead. In the sense that this heaviness *dramatizes* the issue, the pieces can be called theatrical and the teasing of the structural limitations of the lead elements a theatrical mode. This would then be one mode of the theatrical not destructive to ambitious sculpture.)

Structural clarity leaves room for puns and illusionism of all kinds. In 5:30 the "base" is found on top of the sculpture, holding the work "up" by pressing "down," and this helps us to see that the real base of the sculpture is the floor and that it is *always* the floor, the base being defined simply as where the sculpture begins. In *Two-Two-One* the lead pole holds four of the sheet elements up by pressing down on them, but is itself kept in place by the fifth sheet, which just barely catches the pole on its corner, as if the plate were moving away, pulling the rest of the piece after it. In this piece the weight of the materials is momentarily transcended: the rolled lead pin just seems to float above the work, and the illusion of weightlessness is here earned (for a material whose name is practically synonymous with weight) without benefit of paint or weld.

The large splashed-lead piece is a straight process piece, reflective of earlier concerns. Molten lead is splashed against a mold, allowed to harden and then pulled away, and the process repeated. The piece here is comprised of four molds, one 180 degrees, one 90 degrees, one 45 degrees and one U-shaped, or double 90 degrees. Several hardened shapes from each mold lie alongside. One "understands" the piece when one knows how to "go on," that is, when the process by which its current state was arrived at becomes clear. The process and the work are one, the

art and its making both delivered with complete clarity. It is difficult to account for the energy that is released when the mystery of the making is dispelled, but one feels it.

On the way out, one confronts a comical piece: a lead pole about eight feet tall propped between two lead bricks about a foot high, a cock-and-balls piece, a laugh at the gargantuanism, the *machismo* of the show. Very cheeky, very self-assured, as well he deserves to be.

As everyone knows, there are two kinds of WHITNEY ANNUAL. One year it's painting and one year it's sculpture. This year it's painting, so sculptors like Robert Ryman and Richard Tuttle are rigorously excluded, while painters like Kosuth get to litter the walls with index cards. Lynda Benglis got in all right, though her impasto is a little heavy, but the Whitney doesn't yet seem to have decided whether the work of, say Lawrence Weiner or Robert Barry is conceptual painting or conceptual sculpture, so they are kept out of both. The problem of Michael Heizer is solved with a master-stroke: a photograph of one of his sculptures is included in the painting Annual. Alan Shields has a painting that's shaped like a tent, a Trojan Horse stopped at the gates — you'll find it installed down in the sculpture garden, which is as close as you can get to being half in and half out. Even Rosenquist couldn't baffle them: he hung two stretched canvases *on end*, one about six inches above the other, straight out from the wall, like a kind of rudimentary Don Judd. But the Whitney people peeped between, saw canvas and color and knew a painting when they saw one, even if they *couldn't* see it.

Still, it isn't often that one gets to see almost 150 paintings (and index cards and photos and tents) picked completely at random, hung completely at random, and, in many cases, painted completely at random. The "new directions" which are forever "generating" such "creative excitement" among "the younger artists" are here strongly in evidence. The issue, when you come right down to it, is: how to succeed in painting without really trying? 1) Stain? 2) Stripe? 3) Shape? 4) Stain and stripe? 5) Stripe and shape? 6) Shape and stain? 7) Shape and stain and stripe?

It's hard to be a young artist and not know where to turn! There are also a number of post-Irwin halation paintings, though Robert Irwin is himself not in the exhibition. Maybe he'll be in the sculpture Annual.

The SPACES exhibition isn't a very interesting show. Nothing really comes off, perhaps because the show's premises are so wildly overstated. The "spaces" involved are simply rooms, one room per artist (Michael Asher, Larry Bell, Robert Morris, Dan Flavin, Franz Erhard Walter) except for the Pula group, which chose the space of the Museum's sculpture garden. Each artist did something in his room, and what each artist did, even Mr. Walther's wrapping people up in canvas, is taken by Mrs. Jennifer Licht, the show's organizer, to constitute "examples of contemporary investigations of actual, areal space as a nonplastic, yet malleable agent in art." The work just doesn't seem to bear it out.

It seems impossible, for example, to imagine that within the confines of the cubicle assigned to him, Dan Flavin is about to commence a "contemporary investigation of actual, areal, etc., etc." Instead, the piece comes off as testy and ill-tempered. The size of the units are huge for the space they occupy; they appear cramped and ungainly. The light they create is an unpleasant glare, painful to the eyes and bodies of the people in the room. If the work creates an illusion of altering, or at least rendering indeterminate, the shape, size and color of the room, this can't be anything but child's play for Flavin; the content of the piece is its harshness, even its bitterness.

Why Michael Asher should have been honored with an invitation to create a work at the Museum of Modern Art is a mystery. His disastrous dematerialization piece at the Whitney's "Anti-Illusion" show last year should have suggested a waiting period. "One's expectation," writes Mrs. Licht of Asher's room, "is for something to look at, but Asher reduces visual evidence to such a degree that the room can be characterized as a void; and he calls on senses that are less accustomed than sight to apprehend space." But what Mrs. Licht describes simply does not happen. The



room, with its two wide open doorways is in no sense a void and never even gives the illusion of being one. The room, its space and shape, are apprehended plainly by sight. Its sounds are apprehended by ear. Its texture is apprehended by touch. The sound-proofing and sound control simply don't provide enough to make the game worth the candlepower. Whatever Michael Asher is about, he is showing it too soon—and too elaborately; the room was out of order by the second week of the show.

One of the most persistent interests of West Coast artists has been the illusion of disembodied color, achieved through experiments with transparency and translucency in various materials. In some of Larry Bell's most beautiful glass cubes the sensation of color hanging freely in some indeterminate space within the box is achieved for brief periods, but the illusion is difficult to sustain. It is logical that Bell should have moved into an exploration of the possibilities of light (along with several other West Coast artists) and his room thus pursues the same interests that have absorbed him for most of his career. One enters a completely dark room—all the walls, floor and ceiling have been painted black. Since the exhibition's basic orientation is toward the apprehension of space in unusual ways, most viewers simply stumble about in the darkness, satisfied that when they have felt their way along the wall and gained some sense of the room's shape they have gotten the point. If one is getting the piece properly, however, one perceives a dim line of light that appears to hang in space about eight feet above the floor and an uncertain distance into the rear of the room. One can then proceed to find out where the line of light actually is, what the light source actually is, and what is reflecting the light source, but not after one has run through an interesting period of perceptual uncertainty and imbalance. The uncertainty of distances, the uncertainty of the source of light, the disembodied quality of the line that appears to hang in air seem to be what the work is about. It is intended, evidently, as a kind of perceptual conditioner for the effects Bell hopes to achieve with the large,

free-standing glass panels which are to be installed in the room during the second month of the exhibition.

Robert Morris, here as in the Finch College show discussed below, takes the show's purpose literally and tailors a work precisely to its specifications. His room really does deal with spaces, but in a completely metaphorical manner. Methodically adjusting scale relationships—it's almost as if the *medium* of the piece is scale—Morris brings the wide open spaces into a room about 25 feet square. Human beings, feeling gigantic, sight down distant, receding vistas of evergreen trees. Indoors are converted into outdoors, right down to the climate. The work, with its real trees, real earth and real climate control, refers to Hans Haacke and his "real time" investigations, as well as to Michael Heizer. But the extreme distortions of scale relations within a closed room and the Surrealism which creeps into the work inevitably suggest Magritte. In a way, Morris's room is more a three-dimensional realization of Magritte than were any of the actual Magritte sculptures shown in town last month.

It's hard to see what good can come of thinking of the Pulsa group in terms of space or of sculpture. They are more like a kind of theater group. It's always very pleasant to watch their lights flashing and their speakers murmuring. They just go on and on.

Lastly, one can't help wondering, if there is going to be an exhibition like this, why Robert Smithson, whose "Non-Sites" practically sired the exhibition, is not in it. Surely even Mrs. Licht must see that he has more to do with it than someone who wraps people up in canvas and quotes his press notices in the catalog.

Mrs. Elaine Varian, organizer of Finch College's ART IN PROCESS IV show, thinks it's nice to show preparatory sketches, memoranda, notes, etc., along with the work of art, so that viewers can get some idea of the "process" of creation. She framed all the notes and sketches and instructions the artists provided, and hung them on the wall, sometimes even when there was no creation to go with the process of creation. Most of the written material consisted of letters to Mrs. Varian saying, "Yes, I'd love to be in the show. Here is how you assemble my work." (Of

these the most grateful-sounding was Barry Flanagan.) Some of the other stuff was pretty good. An exhausted note from Larry Weiner leaving it to Mrs. Varian as to whether she should actually splash water on the wall or just think about splashing water on the wall. Mel Bochner started scrawling mad-genius stuff like, "Imagine an infinitesimal visual calculus." Carl Andre showed the process of creation by a careful graph-paper sketch of how to pile 120 bricks in two 60-brick squares. There were lots of hi-jinks in the catalog statements as well. "With the foam pieces," writes Lynda Benglis, instantly earning the award for Catalog Statement of the Year, "I am continuing my questioning of formal considerations."

In spite of all this levity there are some uncommonly good pieces in the show. Carl Andre's brick piece is a modest one, quietly reiterating the principles on which his sculpture has been based for the better part of a decade. Eva Hesse's is probably the only piece in the exhibition that has nothing to scream about, no manifesto to adhere to and no theory to back it. It is Abstract Expressionist sculpture of a higher order than I would have thought possible, an inspiration I would not have thought available to a younger artist. Her work here struck me as being as stumbling and as deeply felt, as expressive and as inchoate as, say, a work like Pollock's *She Wolf*.

Robert Morris produced an Art in Process, just as the show called for. A constantly rotating camera photographed all four walls of a room and everything happening in it as Morris and his aides solemnly put up a large mirror, panel by panel, and then a large photo mural (of a bunch of people watching a movie) panel by panel. No sooner up than both mirror and mural were taken down, panel by panel. The work done, the film was developed, looped into a constantly rotating projector in the same room and shown against the very walls on which the actions it depicted had taken place. It is not only Art in Process, but an art in constant process, in process and nothing else, more process than anyone had bargained for. Duchampian and arch, the piece hearkens back to the Morris of the *Box With Sound of its Own Making*.

The show has one of Bruce Nau-



Bruce Nauman, *Lighted Performance Box*, aluminum box w/spotlight, 78 x 20 x 20", 1969.

man's best pieces, *Lighted Performance Box*, an ingenious two-part sculpture. The column of the box is a strong sculptural shape, the kind whose "gestalt" is supposedly delivered at a glance. But what is also delivered at a glance is an imperative to look upward at the square of light thrown onto the ceiling by the lamp within the box. Once noted, the patch of light can't simply be ignored. Taking it into account gives you a two-part sculpture which you "view" by moving your head up and down, like a yo-yo.

—PHILIP LEIDER